

# USDA NEWS

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## Ann Veneman Takes The Helm As Our 27th Secretary

by Ron Hall, Office of Communications

**O**n January 20, 2001, Ann Veneman officially became the 27th secretary of agriculture in USDA's 139-year history. She succeeded Dan Glickman, who served as USDA's secretary from March 30, 1995 until he resigned on January 20, 2001, and is now a partner in the Public Law and Policy Practice Group of the Washington, DC-based lobbying and law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld.

Veneman was sworn in on January 20, the same day that her nomination as agriculture secretary had been confirmed by the U.S. Senate in a unanimous voice vote. Earlier, during her confirmation hearing on January 18 before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Veneman had pledged that, as USDA secretary, "I will work to foster an atmosphere of teamwork, innovation, mutual respect, and common sense within the Department and focus our delivery systems on quality service to our customers."

Before rejoining USDA, from 1999 until her recent swearing-in Veneman was a partner in the law firm of Nossaman, Guthner, Knox & Elliott in Sacramento, Calif., where she specialized in food, agriculture, the environment, technology, and trade-related issues. She served as secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture from 1995-99, where she managed agricultural programs and services for the nation's largest agricultural producing state. During her tenure she pioneered programs and partnerships to enhance food safety, pest and disease prevention and control, and agriculture education. She also made it a priority to expand global opportunities for California agriculture.

From 1991-93 Veneman served as USDA's deputy secretary. The July 1991 issue of the *USDA News* carried her complete biography.

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Secretary **Ann Veneman** (center) is joined by fellow cabinet-level colleagues during their collective swearing-in ceremony on January 20. Joining her are (L to R) Secretary of State **Colin Powell**, Secretary of the Treasury **Paul O'Neill**, Secretary of Defense **Donald Rumsfeld**, Secretary of Commerce **Donald Evans**, Secretary of Energy **Spencer Abraham**, and Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Cabinet **Albert Hawkins**. Note the story on this page.—*PHOTO BY HYUNGWON KANG*

## Here's How—And Why—USDA Compiled Its 'FAIR' List

by Ron Hall, Office of Communications

**"I**t's important that USDA employees have a 'heads-up' on what FAIR is all about, so we'll all know what it is designed to do and not do, and also so we can minimize any potential misunderstandings about it."

Dick Guyer was referring to the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act, or FAIR. Signed into law in 1998, the act requires federal departments and agencies to prepare an annual inventory of activities that they currently perform—as part of their mission—that are "commercial" in nature, and therefore potentially could be performed in the private sector or by other appropriate public entities. By contrast, activities regarded as "inherently governmental" are activities that involve poli-

cy or oversight or require skills unique to the federal work force, and thereby can be performed only by the federal government.

Guyer, executive assistant to USDA's deputy chief financial officer, coordinated the Department's annual FAIR response for both FY 1999 and FY 2000. Both were submitted to the Office of Management and Budget. On December 14, 2000, OMB published a "Notice of Availability" in the Federal Register, advising that USDA's FAIR listing for FY 2000 was available for review by interested parties on USDA's website, [www.usda.gov/ocfo](http://www.usda.gov/ocfo)

He explained that in preparing USDA's two annual submissions thus far, he contacted USDA agency heads generally in May. "We asked them to indicate which of their activities would qualify under the act's definition of 'commercial,'" he said. "But, in addition, agencies determined which of their 'commercial activities' the act exempts from the possibility of private sector competition—and each agency has the right to do that, under the provisions of the FAIR Act."

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# Secretary Ann Veneman



Dear Fellow Employees:

It's great to be back here at USDA. Thank you all for the very warm reception you have given me.

I am deeply honored that President George W. Bush selected me to be the 27th U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, following in the footsteps of so many other leaders here at USDA.

I certainly thank Secretary Dan Glickman and Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger, as well as so many of you, for being so helpful and supportive during the last few weeks. They gave me all the cour-

tesies and provided our transition team with additional background on the many issues here at USDA.

A few weeks ago, when I met with employees on the Patio, I saw so many faces—new and old—that have brought back many fond memories of when I served here at USDA under Secretaries Richard Lyng, Clayton Yeutter, and Edward Madigan.

I am fortunate to have worked with them. And now, I look forward to working with all of you to advance policies and programs in this new administration.

This transition shows that USDA continues to work effectively on behalf of the people it serves. This is only possible be-

cause of the hard work and dedication of our career employees.

As in every new administration, there will be some changes. However, if we work together, I am confident that we can move forward in creating the kind of team that we want to build for the future.

As I said in the Senate confirmation hearing, my goal in coming back to USDA is to find ways to work together and to foster an atmosphere of teamwork, innovation, mutual respect, and common sense. If we do this, then we will be able to give better quality service to those we assist throughout the country.

It's great to be back here at USDA and I am pleased to be working with you again. ♦

*Our 27th Secretary...continued from pg. 1*

cal sketch, following her selection to that position. She served as USDA's deputy under secretary for international affairs and commodity programs from 1989-91, where she focused on international affairs for the Department, including trade policy, trade negotiations, and food aid. From 1987-89 she was the associate administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service. She joined USDA in 1986, serving as an assistant to the FAS administrator, where she concentrated on trade policy.

During her previous tenure at USDA Veneman was actively involved in the Uruguay Round of negotiations concerning the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement.

Veneman, who was raised on a peach farm in Modesto, Calif., holds a B.A. degree in political science from the University of California at Davis, an M.A. degree in public poli-

cy from the University of California at Berkeley, and a Juris Doctorate degree from the University of California, Hastings College of Law.

According to Doug Bowers, a history specialist with the Economic Research Service, Veneman is the ninth secretary of agriculture to have worked at USDA as an employee in a previous capacity before becoming its secretary. That group of nine includes Clayton Yeutter (who served as secretary from 1989-91), Richard Lyng (1986-89), Bob Bergland (1977-81), John Knebel (1976-77), Earl Butz (1971-76), Charles Brannan (1948-53), Claude Wickard (1940-45), and Howard Gore (1924-25). In addition, Bowers noted, Veneman is the second USDA secretary from California, with Lyng being the first.

On January 23, her second full day at the office, Veneman spoke to employees gathered in the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC. Emphasizing her pleasure at being back at the Department, she pointed out that she began her career with USDA with the Foreign Agricultural Service in USDA's South Building—which resulted in additional cheers and applause from those gathered employees who were no doubt also from FAS and/or the South Building.

Veneman then underscored her appreciation for the Department's career employees.

"I just can't tell you how much I think of the career staff here," she affirmed, "because it's what makes this Department the great place that it is." ♦



Secretary Ann Veneman (center) greets USDA employees in the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC, following her remarks to employees on January 23.—PHOTO BY KEN HAMMOND

## Forget Those Frothy Bios & Sports Novels; This Is *Quality* Reading From Our Archives

"If Winter Comes, Can Spring Be Far Behind?" proposed 19th century English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, as he no doubt was planning a spring break trip to Fort Lauderdale to shake away the winter doldrums. Well, we don't want to rush the spring season—who are we kidding?! You're durn tootin' we do! For many USDA employees, a spring break trip will include lounging on a beach towel—engrossed in a good book.

But if you want something with a little more intellectual heft in your spring break reading, latch on to a 'vintage' edition of a USDA Yearbook of Agriculture.

As a cost-saving measure to reduce inventory and cut storage expenses, employees with the Office of Communications and the Office of Operations have been working together to make more of the Department's inventory of USDA Yearbooks of Agriculture available to employees and others who could make good use of them.

OC public affairs specialist **Deborah Takiff Smith** served as editor of the Department's annual Yearbook of Agriculture from 1988 until the last edition, which was published in 1992.

"The Yearbook of Agriculture," she noted, "began as an annual publication in 1895—although the Department had published simi-

## Administrative



lar volumes, not yet called the 'yearbook,' from USDA's inception in 1862."

"Themes would vary every year, and the purpose of each edition was to pass on USDA research and other information to farmers and the general public."

Each yearbook was distributed for free by Members of Congress, who would have a limited supply available for constituents. Copies could also be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents with the Government Printing Office, and they would be sold at government bookstores in many cities.

Surplus copies have been stored in OO's Landover (Md.) Service Center. Over the years OO collected about 21,000 copies of past yearbooks, including copies from nearly every year from the 1950-51 edition—titled "Crops in Peace and War"—forward.

Then last June Smith teamed up with **John Sutton**, chief of Central Supply Stores for OO in Landover, to reduce that surplus. "I contacted the public affairs offices of USDA's program agencies and other outlets that might get the yearbooks to interested readers

around the country," said Smith. "We also kept some archival copies of each edition, to fill congressional requests."

As a result, the inventory of USDA Yearbooks of Agriculture was reduced to a total of 14,000 copies of ten previous editions. Books currently in stock include such editions as "The Face of Rural America" (1976), "Cutting Energy Costs" (1980), "Will There Be Enough Food?" (1981), "Using Our Natural Resources" (1983), "Animal Health" (1984), "U.S. Agriculture in a Global Economy" (1985), "Research for Tomorrow" (1986), "Our American Land" (1987), "Farm Management" (1989), and "Agriculture and the Environment" (1991).

Agencies may still order copies for employees or other readers, and individual employees can now acquire 'vintage' copies on their own. Sutton said he is using USDA's established requisitioning system for this activity. "Just access our web site at [www.lsc.usda.gov](http://www.lsc.usda.gov) and click on the 'Focus' block, or call my office at 301-436-8450 voice or 1-800-877-8339 TTY," he said.

"All an employee has to pay for is a few dollars in postage costs, using their own agency's in-house procurement procedures," he added. "Then we're happy to send out USDA yearbooks to them—until our supply of copies is exhausted."

"I'm personally interested," Sutton quipped, "in spending more time browsing through 'Will There Be Enough Food?'" ♦

*'FAIR' List...continued from pg. 1*

Guyer pointed out that part of the process in preparing the Department's FAIR submission is to give interested parties an opportunity to challenge USDA's FAIR inventory report. "This means," he explained, "that groups—such as federal employee unions which may feel we have too many types of USDA activities listed as 'commercial activities,' and industry trade groups which may feel we don't have enough USDA activities categorized that way—may challenge and appeal any decision within the Department concerning which USDA activities we've listed as commercial."

He noted that in 1999 the Department entertained nine appeals to USDA's FAIR listing. "In 2000," he advised, "there were no challenges or appeals to USDA's FAIR list."

OCFO staff accountant **Mel Robinson** said that in its FAIR report for 2000, USDA identified a total of 46,516 positions as "commercial" in USDA. This number included the following: the Agricultural Marketing Service

(2,553 positions identified as "commercial"), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (4,044), Departmental Administration (226), the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services mission area (1,199), the Food and Nutrition Service (570), the Forest Service (20,230), the Food Safety and Inspection Service (796), the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (197), the National Appeals Division (29), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (8,439), the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (1,438), the Office of the Chief Information Officer (233), the Research, Education, and Economics mission area (5,635), and the Rural Development mission area (927).

As a comparison, according to Office of Human Resources Management computer specialist **Ed McLaughlin**, as of February 20 USDA's work force consisted of 97,000 federal employees—full-time, part-time, and temporary.

Robinson added that even before the

FAIR Act became law in 1998, USDA, like most other federal departments, had been contracting out, or 'outsourcing,' some of its activities to the private sector. "But the difference," he noted, "is that the FAIR Act represents a requirement—by law—that federal departments annually list their activities that are 'commercial' in nature."

Guyer emphasized that, merely because a USDA activity is listed in USDA's FAIR report as "commercial," that does not necessarily mean there are plans to contract that work out to the private sector to accomplish.

"The FAIR Act does *not* require that federal departments and agencies open its 'commercial activities' to competition in the private sector," he explained.

"Within the guidelines of the FAIR Act, it is up to each USDA agency to decide whether to open commercial work to outside competition." ♦



## Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

### “Is That Your Final Answer?”

*Question: Which of the following is a colostrum? A: the first Roman breast pump; B: a technical term for latching on; C: shrimp cocktail; D: a mother's first milk.*

The answer is “D”—and it was one of the many questions posed to participants in a ‘quiz show’ titled “Who Wants to Be a Breastfeeding Expert?” The ‘quiz show,’ sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Service’s Western Regional Office in San Francisco, was a take-off on the internationally-renowned show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” It was part of that office’s recent observance of World Breastfeeding Week.

“I had just bought the board game version of ‘Millionaire’ and had forced my friends to play it,” explained **GeNam Wong**, an FNS food program specialist in the Western Regional Office’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Chil-



*“You’ve selected ‘A: 12 months’ as the answer to the question ‘How long should a mother breastfeed her baby according to the American Academy of Pediatrics’—and you’re right!” affirms FNS’s ‘quiz show’ host **Steve Pichel** (right), as he poses a question to FNS’s **Krister Engdahl**.—PHOTO BY ANNE MCGUIGAN*



*“Whenever I drink coffee out of this mug, I’ll be reminded of the question I missed,” laughs FNS computer specialist **Teresa Schredl** (right), as she shows FNS accounting technician **Sylvia Dower** the “Loving Support Makes Breastfeeding Work” mug she won by making it to round four in the ‘quiz show.’—PHOTO BY ANNE MCGUIGAN*

## Employees make these things...

# HAPPEN!

dren (WIC). “I did well—so I suggested to our Regional Office’s Baby-Friendly Committee that we use a similar ‘quiz show’ format.”

That Committee, which planned the Office’s World Breastfeeding Week activities, also coordinated the creation in 1998 of that Office’s Lactation Room, which allows nursing mothers to pump and store their breast milk in a private, sanitary room with its own refrigerator, and then provide it later to their babies, away from the office. The January-February 1998 issue of the *USDA News* carried a story which pinpointed the locations of other nursing mothers rooms for USDA employees at headquarters and field locations around the country.

So, with the ‘Millionaire’ game theme in mind, the Committee’s eight members got busy bringing it to life. For instance, FNS civil rights intern **Vanessa Lei** teamed up with FNS food stamp program specialist **Marisa Cheung** to design a 31-slide presentation that included three rounds of 10 questions each.

FNS food stamp program specialist **Steve Pichel** volunteered to host “Who Wants to Be a Breastfeeding Expert?” Pichel—who, as a takeoff on “Millionaire’s” **Regis Philbin**, adopted the moniker “**Stegis Pichelbin**” while serving as host—also suggested the development of a PowerPoint presentation so that audience members could follow along and try to guess the correct answer, much like the audience does in ‘the real game.’

Wong assisted in researching the questions and answers, and later concluded that “I especially learned a lot from those questions that were statistically based or technical, like the recommended storage time for pumped breast milk.”

Fans of “Millionaire” will recall that contestants are given three lifelines: phone a friend, poll the audience, or narrow the choices to two. FNS financial management specialist **Gloria Johnson-Lamar** pointed out that the FNS version had its own lifelines: call upon a friend in the audience who is not on the Baby-Friendly Committee, narrow the choic-

es to two, or poll the audience—which would then indicate its choice by clapping.

FNS’s quiz show played to an audience of 30 agency employees. “A lot of the questions were real stumbers,” acknowledged FNS food stamp program specialist **Krister Engdahl**. He made it to the seventh round, until he lost, when he selected “Proteins” instead of “Antibodies” when asked the question “Which of the following is an exclusive benefit of breast milk over formula?” Nonetheless, he walked away with a prize, having won a “Support Breastfeeding” T-shirt.

“This was a fun way,” affirmed FNS accounting technician **Sylvia Dower**, “to promote the benefits of breastfeeding and, at the same time, correct some misconceptions and erroneous information that is out there on this subject.”

—**Diana Callaway**



## Marketing and Regulatory Programs

### In Minutes Instead Of Hours

“Our message to our fellow employees continues to be: don’t hesitate to brainstorm for new ways of carrying out GIPSA’s mission to our customers.”

**John “Mack” Manis** was referring to the role that he and **Bob Crook** have played, over the past few years, as ‘emissaries’ to their colleagues in the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration, both at its headquarters and field offices around the country, as they promoted the message to look for better ways to serve the public.

Manis, GIPSA’s safety and health manager, and Crook, the compliance officer for the GIPSA office in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, know from firsthand experience how those efforts can pay off. Manis explained that a few years back, when he was an agricultural marketing specialist based at the agency’s headquarters office in Washington, DC, he often traveled around the country, making on-site visits to grain elevators and talking with their owners.

Part of GIPSA’s mission is to provide oversight to state and private sector entities which inspect grain, being stored in those elevators, for quality and condition, including contamination by insects and odors.

“Bob and I had stopped at a regional grain elevator co-op in Farnhamville, Iowa,” Manis recounted. “The co-op director said to us, ‘You’re just the people we want to talk to!’”

Crook explained that the co-op was getting its grain inspected by three different private sector inspection agencies, which were designated by GIPSA to perform official grain sampling and grading. The private sector agency doing the inspection was based on which of the co-op's elevators was loading the grain into railcars. But those private sector inspection agencies had different work schedules with different hours, charged the co-op different fees based on varying fee schedules, and generally worked independently of each other. Plus, none of those inspection agencies could provide grain inspection services as quickly as the co-op director said he needed. "The director," he advised, "felt this resulted in a working environment that was hard to manage and was increasingly expensive."

"He told us," Crook added, "that he wanted to be able to pick up the phone and make one call, pay one fee, and generally be able to manage all those activities better. Then he asked us if GIPSA could help him make that happen."

Manis and Crook studied the co-op's operations and brainstormed for possible improvements. "We then concluded," Manis said, "that we could help orchestrate a limited liability partnership, in compliance with existing laws and regulations, that would streamline the services being provided by the three private sector inspection agencies to the co-op—and yet ensure that neither those agencies nor the co-op would lose money as a result of the streamlining."

For instance, they proposed that a portable grain inspection laboratory be built inside a trailer, which could then be towed to the loading sites of the railcars—which are used to haul the stored grain from the elevator to its destination. "Up to that point," Crook noted, "grain samples for inspection were taken by automobile to the nearest private sector inspection agency lab—which was sometimes over 30 miles away—for testing."

"But by grading the grain on-site, the time factor for inspections dropped from hours to minutes."

The grain co-op put Manis and Crook's streamlining proposal into effect—and reported that, during its first year in operation, the new system saved the co-op an estimated \$250,000.

Manis and Crook were subsequently recognized by the Department and GIPSA for their 'troubleshooting' solution. "That sent a signal to us and our GIPSA colleagues," Manis affirmed, "that we shouldn't hesitate to propose new ways of carrying out our mission,

and that such proposals are appreciated—by the Department, by our agency, and by our customers."

—Ron Hall



## Rural Development

### Ash And H2O Don't Mix

YECCHHH! Who wants drinking water that tastes like burned forest?!

But that was the situation facing the 75 residents of the remote town of Atlanta, Idaho, located on the eastern edge of the Boise National Forest. Last August a wildfire burned 33,000 acres of that Forest. When the residents of Atlanta returned to their homes, following a mandatory evacuation, they found their nearly 30-year-old water system laden with ash and sediment and unable to filter those impurities out.

But on January 19 the Rural Utilities Service approved a \$50,000 loan which will enable the community to pay for recent emergency improvements to its water system. "Specifically," explained **Dave Flesher**, a rural development specialist with the Rural Development area office in Caldwell, Idaho, "through those emergency improvements, the community is now able to filter out that ash and sediment which continue to enter the water system intake because of that summer wildfire."

Flesher pointed out several factors which made RUS's emergency assistance unique. "First, it's very rare that a water system is severely damaged by a wildfire," he noted. "Second, normally it can take up to a year for funding such as this to get approved. But because this was a rare emergency situation, the loan approval process was accelerated—to the benefit of the residents of Atlanta."

In fact, Flesher had met with Atlanta Water Association officials earlier in November, on-site at the location of the town's damaged water system. "At night it was five below zero outside where we were standing," he advised. "So we all knew that it was critical that USDA help the Association install a viable, functioning emergency water system to ensure a clean water supply through the winter—until further improvements can be made to their water system this spring, using funding from other sources."

Flesher said that RD's recent initiative took place in conjunction with the work of

employees from the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. According to **Dick Markley**, an FS district ranger based in Idaho City, the hillsides surrounding Atlanta were burned and scorched by the wildfire—at a level he described as "high intensity but moderate severity."

"So, when the rains came," he advised, "there wasn't anything to hinder the flow of ash and sediment runoff, and it flowed directly into the town's water system intake." He described it as being like a black 'Slurpee' moving rapidly down a hill, picking up debris as it moved.

This past autumn Markley headed up a team of FS hydrologists, from the Boise National Forest, which stabilized two hillside drainages, just outside the town limits of Atlanta but on National Forest property, under a program called "BAER," or Burn Area Emergency Rehabilitation. "One of those drainages does supply water to that town," explained FS hydrologist **Cavan Maloney**, "and the other simply drains through the town, but isn't a water supply."

"But they both needed to be stabilized," added FS hydrologist **T.J. Clifford**. "And that's what we did."

In the meantime, **Bill Moore**, NRCS's coordinator for the Southwest Idaho Resource Conservation & Development Council, based in Meridian, Idaho, helped coordinate efforts of various federal, state, and local sources of assistance to provide resources needed to get Atlanta's water system back on track.

"Our Forest Service hydrologists estimate that it'll take up to eight to ten years for the hillsides to stabilize," Flesher advised. "But we'll be there with the residents of Atlanta for the long-term, helping make sure that they have quality drinking water."

—Ron Hall



An operator for the Atlanta (Idaho) Water Association observes how a stream of water, at the town's water system intake facility, flows over a black plastic tarp. That tarp was placed over the intake to divert some of the ash and sediment away from the town's water supply.—PHOTO BY DAVE FLESHER



**D**ale Moore was named chief of staff to Secretary **Ann Veneman**. He succeeded **Eric Olsen**, who was chief of staff to [then] Secretary **Dan Glickman** from

March 2000 until January 2001.

Before joining USDA, from February 1997 until his appointment in February 2001 Moore served as the executive director for legislative affairs at the Washington, DC-based National Cattlemen's Beef Association. He was the legislative director of the Committee on Agriculture at the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995-96, where he worked on the formulation and passage of the 1996 Farm Bill. From 1993-94 he worked as the Republican legislative coordinator for the House Agriculture Committee.

Moore served as the minority counsel for the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Department Operations, Research, and Foreign Agriculture from 1991-93. From 1985-91 he was the agricultural legislative assistant for [then] U.S. Rep. **Pat Roberts** (R-Kan.), who is now a U.S. Senator from Kansas.

## Editor's Roundup

### USDA people in the news

A native of Copeland, Kan., where he was raised on a livestock, hay, and grain farm, Moore holds a B.S. degree in animal science/biology from Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kan. ♦



**Phil Fulton** was selected as the associate administrator of the Economic Research Service. He succeeded **Kelley White**, who served in that position from December 1995 until August 2000, when he retired following 15 years of service with ERS.

Before joining USDA, from 1998 until he was selected for this position, effective in December 2000, Fulton served on a detail to the Office of Management and Budget, where he was director of its Census Address List Appeals Office. In that position he adjudicated disputes between local governments and the U.S. Bureau of the Census regarding the accuracy of address lists used in conducting the 2000 Census. He had been detailed to that position from the U.S. Department of Transportation, where from 1993-98 he was associate director of its Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

Fulton served as assistant chief of the Population Statistics Division at the U.S. Census Bureau from 1986-93, where he was responsible for designing the computer tapes and reports that provided the results of the 1990 Census, as well as developing special tabulations used as references in the allocation of funds for federal programs. From 1977-86 he was chief of the Census Bureau's "Journey to Work" Statistics Branch, which focused on statistics concerning commuting in the United States. He began his federal career in 1975 as a statistician with the Census Bureau. In that position he conducted studies concerning commuter behavior and commuting patterns of Americans, in the aftermath of the 'Energy Crisis of 1973-74' in the U.S.

A native of Alma, Mich., Fulton holds a B.A. degree in social sciences as well as M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in sociology, all from Michigan State University. ♦



**Chris Gomez** was selected as the deputy director of the Office of Operations. He succeeded **George Aldaya**, who served in that position from 1999 until August

2000, when he became director of the Kansas City (Mo.) Commodity Office with the Farm Service Agency.

From 1994 until he was selected for this position, effective in November 2000, Gomez served as the assistant administrator for procurement and administrative services in the Rural Development mission area. He was director of the Procurement Management Division in the [then] Farmers Home Administration from 1991-94.

From 1990-91 Gomez served as director of the Office of Procurement Operations at the U.S. Department of Commerce. He was



"I think I'll take a quick look at this particular edition before we mail it out," says **John Sutton** (right), chief of OO's Central Supply Stores in Landover, Md., as he and OO sales representative **James Hogan** (left) and OO supply technician **Mary Clinton** prepare 'vintage' copies of past USDA Yearbooks of Agriculture for mailing to employees and others who are interested. Note the story on page 3.—**PHOTO BY RON COOPER**

deputy director of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization at the Department of Commerce from 1986-90. From 1982-86 he served as director of Commerce's Procurement Systems Branch, after having worked from 1980-82 as director of administrative services in the Office of Minority Business Development at that department. He owned a family franchise restaurant in Tucson, Ariz., from 1976-80. From 1970-74 he served as a logistics officer in the U.S. Air Force.

A long-time resident of Tucson, Gomez holds a B.A. degree in political science from the College of Saint Thomas in St. Paul, Minn. ♦



**"No,** I'm just boring—and I'm just lucky I've been able to sing it as much as I have."

**Debbie Goldberg** may have carved a whole new definition for the term

"modest," as she referred to her experience singing Handel's "Messiah," as part of the Independence Messiah Choir of Independence, Mo. Goldberg, a cotton management analyst in the Farm Service Agency's Kansas City Administrative Office in Kansas City, Mo., has sung the "Messiah" for 25 out of the 84 years that the Independence Messiah Choir has been in existence.

She said that those live performances, which take place each Saturday before Thanksgiving, have then been rebroadcast on Christmas Day over public radio, worldwide, for all 25 years of her participation, as well as rebroadcast over cable TV worldwide for the last 12 years.

Ironically, Goldberg's pre-Thanksgiving performance this past year was the first time that she had lost her voice on the day of the concert, due to a touch of flu. "So I had to mouth the words," she acknowledged. "But the 300-person choir is big enough that I was able to fake it okay."

On three previous occasions she had gotten laryngitis just prior to the performance,

but she said her voice came back for her "just in time."

So, how about coughing or sneezing: how do you avoid that?

"Well, a few times I've gotten that urge," Goldberg recalled. "But when that happens—and if the pocketfuls of throat lozenges our choir director distributes to us aren't doing the trick—then you can either leave discretely via the back stairs to the choir loft, or you can muffle it—and I've been able to muffle it satisfactorily, so far."

Have you ever felt like fainting while having to stand during the three-hour concert?

"Not if you stand with your knees bent," she explained. "You actually lean into the music, and that's really a reaction to the music itself." She added that the choir members do get to sit down during the estimated 15 solos that are part of Handel's "Messiah."

"Actually," Goldberg pointed out, "the hardest part is holding the 3/4-inch thick, hard-cover book that contains three hours worth of music." According to **Sue Carpenter**, a management analyst in FSA's Kansas City Administrative Office, here is Goldberg's technique for coping: she holds the book with her right hand, palm up, braces her right elbow into her hip, and turns the 250 pages with her left hand. "After 25 years," she said, "I've memorized it all by now—but I still display the book for the sake of appearance."

"Oh," she then quickly added, "don't let me forget the bright-hot lights that are used during the taping of our performances—which don't tend to go well with my long-sleeved velvet robe, or with the tuxes the men are wearing."

"I hope I'll be forgiven," she quipped, "if I admitted that, once those lights have been shining on us for about two hours, I'm thinking of the beach and a 'tall, cool one'..."

During 25 years of performing the "Messiah," has your voice changed?

"It's gotten lower," she noted. "Although I'm still a soprano, who, these days, can't really hit high 'E' anymore, I guess my voice is moving closer to smokey and husky."

Finally, during the celebrated pause just before the end of the "Hallelujah Chorus," have you ever accidentally kept singing during that silence?

Goldberg explained that it's only a small pause, or "hold," written into the musical score. But for dramatic effect, conductors have broadened the pause over the years.

"And no, I've never kept singing during that pause," she emphasized. But she said that, during her earlier years with the Independence Messiah Choir, she "came in early" on some phrases. "Our conductor," she quipped, "taught us that, if that happens to *you*, just turn and glare at the person *next* to you."

And have you ever had to glare at anyone in that situation?

"Oh no," Goldberg laughed. "But I've noticed a few times that *they've* been glaring at *me!*" ♦

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## Letters

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This "Letters" section is an opportunity for USDA employees to communicate with Secretary **Ann Veneman**, through questions or comments, on matters that would be appropriate and of general interest to USDA employees across the country. She invites employees to use this particular forum in the **USDA News** to communicate with her, by using the following mailing address: "Letters," Sec. Ann Veneman, USDA, STOP #0190, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250.



*This water truck from the Idaho National Guard is pulling into Atlanta, Idaho to deliver badly needed potable water to the 75 residents of that remote town. Its water system was damaged because of a wildfire which roared through that region last August. But employees of RD, FS, and NRCS recently teamed up on a unique mission to help that town get its emergency water system improved enough to make it through this winter—and thereby help its residents avoid having to drink water that tastes like burned forest. Note the story on page 5.—PHOTO BY BILL MOORE*



#### HELP US FIND

#### **Dakota Cousimano**

Missing: 03-01-2000 From: Pasadena, TX

D.O.B. 08-29-1995 Sex: Male

Hair: Brown Eyes: Brown

Height: 3 ft. 1 in. Weight: 60 lbs.

If you have information, please call

**1-800-843-5678**

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

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*CYFAR (Children, Youth, & Families at Risk) 2001 Conference*

San Diego, Calif.

(202) 720-5075 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

#### ◆ **Month of March**

*Women's History Month*

USDA headquarters and field offices

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